

## Acts 15.

## The Jerusalem Meeting

**Step One: The principle of reading Acts between the Gospels and the letters has been applied to the content in chapter fifteen:**

Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and then continued with the same general cast of characters as he began Acts of the Apostles.

Let us then first recall what Luke recorded in his Gospel about the main subject in this chapter.

The subject is how **“The remnant of men may seek the Lord.”** Acts 15:17. In other words, the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, may seek the Lord.

The following are some statements made by Jesus recorded in Luke’s Gospel. Some specifically mention the Gentiles, others may be suggestive.

1. Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to be circumcised when He was eight days old. See John 7:22, 23. Simeon, a devout and righteous man, moved by the Holy Spirit took Jesus in his arms and quoting Isaiah said Jesus would be **“a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”** Luke 2:32.
2. Someone ask Jesus, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” Luke 13:23. After making a few comments about the scene at Judgment to His Jewish audience, Jesus said, “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.  
People will come from east and west and north and south, and take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.” Luke 13:28,29.

**Step Two: The principle** is that after we understood Jesus Christ was sent to be a light for the Gentiles in Luke’s Gospel, we can now see how Jesus became light for those in the Acts narratiive after He became king.

Please review our study in Acts 9:32-12:24. “So then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” Acts 11:18.

With the foregoing in mind we are now prepared to read Acts Chapter Fifteen.

**Scene one:** 15:1-4. Jews went out from the church at Jerusalem and disturbed the church at Antioch.

1. “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” V. 1.
2. The church appointed Paul and Barnabas along with some other believers to go up to see the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this matter.

**Scene two:** 15:5-21. **The meeting in Jerusalem.**

Note: At this time, church government still included the powerful office of the “apostolic ministry” working along with the ordained elders in every church. See Acts 11:30.

1. Some Pharisees came into the church; however, they still held to the “old wineskins.” They wanted all males to be circumcised, etc.
2. Peter’s speech: 7-11.
  - a. God showed He accepted the Gentiles by giving the Holy Spirit to them.
  - b. God purified their hearts by faith and saved them through the grace of our Lord Jesus.

**Step Three of the principle:** Learn the details of the issue being discussed in this chapter by studying the letters.

**One.** First we need to understand where circumcision was first introduced and what it represented. Read Romans 4:1-25.

- a. “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.”
  - b. “Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? Did the blessing of being counted righteous by faith come before or after circumcision? It was not after but before.” Vs. 9-10 .
  - c. “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised in order that righteousness might be credited to them.” V. 11.
  - d. Conclusion: The blessing we need in order to have peace with God is “justification by faith.” Rom. 3:21-26.
- How to have peace with God was the issue being discussed in Acts 15.** The blessing did not come by circumcision but by faith in Jesus’ crucifixion. See V. 25.
- e. “Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles, too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by that same faith.” Rom. 3:30. See I Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6

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3. Speaking in a prominent Pharisee's house in Jerusalem, Jesus gave a parable in response to someone who proclaimed, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Luke 14:15.

Jesus' parable is about a man who prepared a banquet for a certain group of people. (They very likely represented the Jews to whom Jesus was speaking.) When this group made a lot of excuses for not attending, the man invited "the poor, the crippled, the blind and lame."

Still there was room for more.

The last group the man who made the great banquet called may represent the Gentiles. Luke 14:15-24.

4. While teaching in the temple court, Jesus used a parable about a vineyard to warn the Jews about the lack of fruit they had produced for God. Then He ask, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." Luke 20:15. He gave it to the Lord's church. The ball is in our court. We must produce the fruit or suffer the possibility of losing our connection with the kingdom of God.

- c. Peter admonished the Pharisees to stop testing God.

3. Paul and Barnabas related their experiences of converting Gentiles on their first missionary journey and in Antioch. V. 12.
4. James, the elder, spoke: 13-21. (See Acts 21:18; I Cor. 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9; Matt. 13:55; Jas. 1:1).
  - a. James said the prophets agreed with Peter about the acceptance of the Gentiles.
  - b. "It is my judgment therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." V. 19. James then suggested that a letter be written for the churches in general and the church at Antioch, specifically. See Acts 15:23; 16:4.

**Scene three:** 15:22-29. The conclusion was taken by "the apostles and elders, with the whole church."

1. They would send Silas and Judas with Paul and Barnabas to confirm to the church at Antioch the content of the letter.
2. The letter: See Acts 15:23-29.

**Scene four:** 15:30-41. The church in Antioch was very happy with the letter. Judas and Silas, both prophets, stayed around a while and encouraged the church before leaving to go back to Jerusalem. Finally, Paul and Barnabas decided to revisit the churches they had co-built with Jesus on their first journey. After some disagreement about John Mark they made two teams: John Mark and Barnabas sailed for Cyprus. Paul and Silas visited the churches that had been co-built by planting the word of God in Asia Minor. They then entered Europe with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### Two. The term "circumcision."

- a. The Apostle Paul used the "cutting off" concept in physical circumcision as an analogy of a Christian's new birth. See Col. 2:11-15.
- b. Paul, also, used the word "circumcision," for the identity of God's people from the time of Abraham. It is used for the identity of Christians. "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh - ... Philippians 3:3.
- c. God's seal for His people today is our gift and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." II Cor. 1:21, 22.
- d. Both Jews and Gentiles were promised through Abraham's seed justification by faith and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Gal. 3:8, 14.

### Questions for Discussion

- A. Things we can learn from a study of Luke's Gospel about God's plan to "open the door of faith for the Gentiles" in column one.
1. Who made the announcement that Jesus would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles?"
  2. Jesus presented a scene in which some Jews would be weeping. This was His answer to, "Lord are only a few people going to be saved?" Why were these Jews weeping?
  3. In Luke chapter fourteen Jesus was attempting to help some Pharisees understand how they could be rewarded "at the resurrection of the righteous." Someone got excited and testified, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Jesus responded with a parable about a certain man who was preparing for a banquet. Please read this parable and note how at certain intervals different groups were invited. Which of the three groups may suggest the Gentiles were also invited to "eat at the feast in the kingdom of God?"
  4. In another engagement with Jewish leaders, Jesus plainly told them the kingdom would taken from them and given to a people who would produce fruit. To whom did He plan to give the kingdom of God?
- B. Jesus is fulfilling Simeon and Isaiah' prophecy that He was the light for the Gentiles.
1. Please read Acts 15:1, 5; 21:20, 21. From the information in these scriptures, describe the problems both for the evangelists and the church.
  2. Who did the church at Antioch appoint to see about this problem? To whom did they go?
  3. What do we understand about the function of the governments of the different congregations of the church at this point in Acts? (Why didn't they just call for a preachers' meeting?)
  4. How did God show He had accepted the Gentiles into the fellowship of believers?
5. Peter made two other points in his speech at the meeting of the apostles and elders. What were they?
  6. Explain the experiences Paul and Barnabas had had before this meeting.
  7. Approximately how much time had passed since the conversion of Cornelius' household and this meeting in Jerusalem?
  8. Who spoke to reconcile Peter's speech and Paul and Barnabas' report with the Old Testament prophets? What was his suggestion as a possible solution?
- C. When Luke said the whole assembly was present at this meeting, do you think the women were included? See verse 12 and 22. Do you think the women voiced their approval of sending Judas and Silas to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas? These are thought questions in the light of present day thinking in the world realm about gender.
- D. In our review of Luke's gospel we can understand Jesus had something in mind for people other than the Jews. We could not determine exactly what this was from the gospels. We learn much more about what He had in mind by seeing what happened in Acts. We learned many details by listening in on this meeting and the sermons Paul and Peter preached. However, because "opening the door of faith for Gentiles" was a complicated major move of God in history, we need to study the letters. It was complicated by the fact that it was necessary to change the minds and hearts of both the Jews and Gentiles. This complication became evident very early in the young churches. Paul wrote several letters for the express purpose of simplifying this complication. Please study the scriptures in column three with the foregoing in mind for your own understanding or for class discussion.